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ABSTRACT

The nation-wide study assessed the effectiveness of the various delivery systems providing early intervention services to handicapped young children. The Battelle Developmental Inventory was the primary measure of child development. A series of parent measures were used and demographic information was also collected. Data from project sites including approximately 580 parents were analyzed, examining the relationship between family demographics, family functioning, and teacher ratings of parental involvement in their children's education programs. Families from low socio-economic status groups were rated by teachers as less involved with their children's programs than parents from higher income groups. Furthermore, these low income families had fewer resources and sources of support available to them. Data were interpreted to suggest that expected levels of parental involvement should take into consideration the family's economic, social, and educational resources, and that service providers will need to somehow address these areas when significant needs are evident. (Author/DB)

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Family Demographics, Family Functioning, and Parent Involvement

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Running Head: Family Type and Stress

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Family Demographics, Family Functioning, and Parent Involvement

ABSTRACT

This nation-wide study was conducted under the auspices of the Early Intervention Research Institute's (EIRI) contract to assess the effectiveness of various early intervention program delivery systems. Data were collected on both children and families, with the mother typically responding to the family data forms. The Battelle Developmental Inventory was the primary measure of child development, and a series of parent measures were used, including: the Parenting Stress Index (PSI), the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES), the Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILEC), the Family Resource Scale (FRS), and the Family Support Scale (FSS). In addition, demographic and parent involvement information were collected utilizing measures designed by the EIRI staff.

For the purposes of this study, data across all current project sites including approximately 580 parents was analyzed, examining the relationship between family demographics, family functioning, and teacher ratings of parental involvement in their children's education programs. Families from low socio-economic status groups were rated by teachers as less involved with their child's programs than parents from higher income groups. Furthermore, these low income families had fewer sources and resources of support available to them. Data were interpreted to suggest that expected levels of parental involvement should take into consideration the family's economic, social, and educational resources, and that service providers will need to somehow address these areas when significant needs are evident.

Family Demographics, Family Functioning, and Parent Involvement

Parental involvement in the child's education is nearly universally considered important, both for normal and handicapped children (Rosenberg & Robinson, 1988). It is likely that parental involvement is even more important when the child is handicapped, since handicapped children may be even less likely to overcome deprived surroundings. However, little is known about those factors which are related to parental involvement. For example, does maternal employment adversely affect parental involvement, since a working mother supposedly has less time for domestic duties than a full-time mother? Does family cohesion affect the level of parental involvement?

The purpose of this study was to determine which factors are related to parental involvement in their child's education. Both demographic variables and family functioning measures were considered.

Method

Subjects were 716 children enrolled throughout the EIEI studies. Table 1 shows the characteristics of these subjects, who were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups for purposes of the larger study.

The parents of subjects enrolled in home-based programs (N = 260) completed the Parent Survey (i.e., the demographic form), Parent Stress Index, (PSI), (Abidin, 1983); Family Support Scale, (FSS), (Dunst, Jenkins, and Trivette, 1984); Family Resource Scale, (FRS), (Dunst and Leet, 1985); and Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scales III, (FACES), (Olson, Portner, and Lavee, 1985); were utilized in this analysis. These measures taken at pretest time were used to predict parental involvement, which was assessed at post test time.

Parental involvement was assessed through ratings of the parents by the child's teacher or intervenor. Teachers were asked to rate the parents as to whether they were low, moderate, or high in terms of involvement. Teachers rated parents on three aspects of involvement: parental support, parental knowledge, and parental attendance. Parental support included such activities as attending IEP meetings, nonrequired activities such as workshops, and keeping scheduled appointments. Parental knowledge included variables such as being knowledgeable about their child's handicapping condition, their child's right to an appropriate education, etc. Parental support measures such things as parental assistance in school projects, providing carryover of the child's goals into the home, completing required forms on time, etc. These three areas were summed to create an overall index of parental involvement.

Results

A normal distribution of parental involvement scores was observed, indicating that teacher rating of parents was skewed neither negatively nor positively. Level of parental involvement was broken into nearly equal numbers of low, medium, and highly involved parents. Low involvement was a total score below 6, medium involvement was a total score of 6 or 7, and high involvement was a score above 8.

Table 1

Characteristics of Subjects in EIEI Studies

Variable	Basic Intervention (Group #1) $\bar{X}$	(SD)	n	Expanded Intervention (Group #2) $\bar{X}$	(SD)	n	P Value
o Age of child in months as of 7-1-88	3.80	(1.57)	355	3.70	(1.62)	363	.410
o Age of mother in years	31.26	(6.71)	320	31.34	(6.89)	330	.884
o Age of father in years	33.79	(6.67)	301	33.99	(7.43)	311	.725
o Percent Male*	58%		355	61%		363	.353
o Years of Education for Mother	12.67	(2.44)	334	12.85	(2.33)	335	.329
o Years of Education for Father	13.11	(2.42)	310	13.19	(2.49)	311	.673
o Percent with both parents living at home	79%		324	83%		326	.258
o Percent of children who are Caucasian*	87%		286	89%		293	.455
o Hours per week mother employed	11.48	(17.21)	305	11.63	(16.87)	313	.912
o Hours per week father employed	37.62	(16.59)	261	39.37	(16.23)	277	.216
o Percent of mothers employed as technical managerial or above*	13%		322	15%		327	.477
o Percent of fathers employed as technical managerial or above*	36%		290	34%		292	.689
o Total household income	24070.10	(18264.97)	300	24766.23	(19677.21)	308	.652
o Percent receiving public assistance	37%		305	34%		311	.577
o Percent with mother as primary caregiver*	93%		300	93%		312	.859
o Percent of children in daycare more than 5 hours per week*	22%		299	21%		307	.789
o Number of siblings	1.60	(1.66)	322	1.51	(1.79)	335	.509
o Percent with English as primary language	97%		319	99%		326	

The results of the ANOVAs which were done on continuous variables can be observed in Table 2. Level of parental involvement was found to increase with parental education (both mother and father, all groups significantly different), parental age (highly involved significantly different from medium and low involved), number of resources (highly involved significantly different from medium and low involved), and number of sources of support (highly involved significantly higher than low involved). Highly involved parents had more children, on the average, than did medium and low involved parents. Highly involved parents felt significantly less stress at pretest time than did low involved parents. (It should be noted that all groups fell into the "high stress" range, however.) Parental involvement was unaffected by perceived amount of time available.

Table 2
Relationship of Parental Involvement to
Demographic and Family Function Measures

	Low Involvement			Medium Involvement			High Involvement			
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	n	p
Education—Mother	11.13	1.93	87	12.26	1.84	73	13.56	2.05	95	.000
Education—Father	11.51	2.12	77	12.68	1.73	66	13.77	2.29	96	.000
Age of Mother	29.43	6.50	86	29.14	6.03	74	33.00	5.76	95	.000
Age of Father	32.57	7.05	77	31.51	6.26	65	35.28	6.12	96	.001
Number of Siblings	1.5	1.67	88	1.31	1.18	74	1.90	1.41	98	.024
PSI-Total Stress	258.33	43.89	87	250.44	41.95	73	244.16	40.89	98	.076
PSI-Child	123.23	21.07	87	115.56	21.13	73	114.52	20.34	98	.012
PSI-Parent	135.13	26.67	87	134.88	25.23	73	129.59	27.25	98	.282
FSS-Total	25.72	11.17	79	27.15	10.48	66	30.09	12.04	93	.038
FRS-Total	109.16	18.73	83	112.35	17.62	65	119.37	17.87	94	.001
FRS-General Resources	69.67	12.60	83	71.57	12.62	65	78.14	12.06	94	.000
FRS-Time	37.22	9.89	83	37.65	8.14	65	39.54	10.68	94	.247
FRS-Physical Resources	29.06	4.43	83	29.65	5.16	65	31.40	3.92	94	.002
FRS-External Support	21.69	4.70	83	23.06	4.54	65	24.26	4.36	94	.001
FACE-Adaptability	9.65	7.13	78	7.20	6.14	65	6.88	5.57	94	.010
FACE-Cohesion	8.72	7.04	78	7.63	6.74	64	7.51	6.70	94	.468
FACE-Total	18.37	11.32	78	14.83	9.12	64	14.39	9.04	94	.021

Family adaptability was more important in determining parental involvement than was family cohesion. Families more balanced in the area of adaptability (that is, structured or flexible) were more likely to be highly involved than were less balanced families (those more rigid or chaotic).

Nominal variables were compared using a Chi-Square test of independence. and by maternal employment. Involvement was found to be unaffected by the ethnic status of the child [X^2 (3) = 3.02, p = .388], whether the child was first or later born, [X^2 (3) = 5.20, p = .158], the occupational status of the mother [X^2 (3) = 3.26, p = .353], or whether or not the mother worked [X^2 (3) = 5.40, p = .145]. However, occupational status of the father was important in that higher status was related to higher involvement [X^2 (3) = 37.08, p = .000],. Single parents [X^2 (3) = 18.60, p = .000], and those on public assistance [X^2 (3) = 18.94, p = .000] were less involved overall.

Significant variables were entered into a stepwise multiple regression equation in which parental involvement was the dependent variable (see Table 3). The best predictors of parental involvement were found to be the education of the mother, family income, total family support, and the FACES total score. Together, these variables accounted for approximately 37% of the variance. All variables were positively related to parental involvement with the exception of the FACES total. Since higher scores indicate less balance in the family, the negative relationship between parental involvement and the FACES total is as would be expected--more balanced families are more likely to be highly involved.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Table Depicting
Predictors of Parental Involvement

Variable	B	R^2
Education of mother	.290	.2279
Income	.179	.2899
Family support-total	.048	.3445
FACES total	-.035	.3719
Constant	.963	

Discussion

Where the mother has a higher level of education, the family has a higher income and level of support, and the type of family functioning is balanced rather than extreme, higher levels of parental involvement in the child's education can be predicted. Variables such as maternal employment or perceived amount of time available in the family were found to be unimportant.

These results suggest that those who are highest in parental involvement may be those least in need of help for their children. While these results need replication, they also suggest that special efforts may be needed to involve those parents who are more in need of resources and support. Programs may need to address those needs if they wish to increase parental involvement. Determination of the specific areas in which these parents are most likely to benefit may yield great value in providing effective intervention for young handicapped children.

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